

# Consciousness's Stream Through "The Tunnel"

WHEN Dorothy M. Richardson is intelligible she is excellent; but when she is not, which is very, very often, she is bewildering. *The Tunnel* is the fourth volume in a series called *Pilgrimage*, which apparently designs to be the subjective rendering of Miriam Henderson's life. The book, taken conventionally as a novel, starts nowhere and ends nowhere. To imagine it one must get out to some smoothly flowing stream and arbitrarily take a hundred yards of "still water" as a model. But there is something so tantalizingly attractive about it that it may not be dismissed as a tour de force in composition. First of all it is an intellectual stimulant. One must read with extreme care to extract the genuine values that run deep.

The book is not so much the history of a human being as it is the meticulous rendering of a woman's mind. What Miriam

Henderson thinks is what counts, not what she does; and for the length of a novel the reader must follow this sometimes intricate, sometimes obvious, rendering of Miriam's mental moods. The book shifts and fluctuates as to action. But the steady stream of consciousness of the woman who is living this life never falters. Some of her moods are obscure (perhaps this is the fault of the reviewer) and some positions seem unreal, but it goes on and on, a river of the mind. One feels that Miss Richardson too can go on forever, adding volume after volume to this series, and so take Miriam Henderson to the grave before she reaches the logical end of the theme.

It is not necessary to read the volumes which preceded *The Tunnel* in order properly to take up the thread of action. There is no action, in that sense. Each book is like a slice cut anywhere out of a woman's life. One slice is as good as an-

other. It is so with life. There is no beginning, no end, only the everlasting intensiveness of the unwearying mind as it observes, deliberates and draws its conclusions—conclusions that are but a starting point to further ratiocinations on the morrow. Miriam Henderson's life in itself is not especially interesting, if we except certain detached moments and episodes—none of these too clearly put. But this does not matter. Whether it is Miriam Henderson or another is not to the point. The entire value and obvious scheme of *The Tunnel* is to project the human mind upon paper in such a way that the reader may receive the impression of an actual person. It is like sitting down and looking into a human brain, watching its curious mechanism and understanding its unending revolutions.

This fourth volume of *Pilgrimage* finds Miriam Henderson living in a lodging house upon one pound a week. She is private secretary to a dentist and a vivid picture of the rigorous routine of a dentist's office is presented through her attitude toward her work. She has few friends, but enough to serve her as means of self-expression. Mag and the German woman, Jan, are living figures, but they never overshadow Miriam. She is first of all in the book; indeed, she is the book. Miriam calls on friends, works steadily, learns to ride the bicycle, is plainly interested in a dentist, Hancock, and finally makes up her mind to become a writer. Dozens of small episodes serve her as means of presenting her moods. One can hardly call them moods, for the most part. They are cerebral reactions; what she thinks about this and that; how a certain thing affects her; a series of mental photographs, some of them rather opaque, but most of them stimulating.

It would be dangerous to call *The Tunnel* a novel written in the imagist style, for hardness and clarity are not too often apparent. But the work is an attempt deliberately to convey, with surprising completeness, the history of a stream of consciousness. It is a subjective theme offered in an objective manner. The novelist never intrudes, not for a single moment; there are no conclusions drawn. Even Miriam never does that for the reader. One must catch this mind on the wing and adjust one's own conclusions to it. Whether this is worth while or not will rest entirely with the individual reader. Miriam herself is not worth any excessive intellectual ardor, but the reader may be moved to find certain answers to the great questions of life in the convolutions of her mind.

Miss Richardson has set out to perform a surprising feat, and from all appearances she has succeeded. That her method of composition will be widely popular is to be doubted. Rather will it appeal to other writers, to those earnest persons who love a superabundance of intellectual distinction in their mental food. The average reader will get through the book for a hundred pages or so, if he is really ambitious, and then put it down with a blank look and feebly wonder what it's all about. Ah, dear reader, it is all about you; it is all about the people you know. But even this will not impress itself any too strongly upon the reader. He will look for a story and find no story. He will look for a coherent unfolding of a character and find no such thing. It will not occur to him that life is no story as we understand stories, or that no real character ever coherently unfolds. These are things that Miss Richardson has sensed and tried to intimate.

The fifth addition to this series, called *Interim*, is already running serially in *The Little Review*. Whether it will be followed by another is unknown. Certainly the title is suggestive and leaves room for something to follow.

Miss Richardson's ability to project her character and to present Miriam's stream of consciousness, giving a sense of actuality, lifts *The Tunnel* above a mere ambitious attempt. The reader, although he may not understand, never doubts the truthfulness of Miriam Henderson's mind. He feels a living personality. It is this realization that makes those who do read Miss Richardson take her quite seriously. H. S. G.

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